



MEMORANDUM

March 21, 2012

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Cindy Kebba, Planner III

VIA: David Levy, Chief of Long Range Planning

SUBJECT: *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place* – Work Session #20
Parks and Open Space

On March 28, 2012, the Planning Commission will hold a work session on the draft Rockville Pike Plan, which can be found at <http://www.rockvillemd.gov/rockvillespike/2010DraftPlan/index.html>. The topic for this work session will be Parks and Open Space in the Rockville Pike Plan area.

As the Rockville Pike corridor redevelops with mixed uses over the next few decades, the need for parks and open space will grow. The Rockville Pike Plan will need to address this issue by providing recommendations for obtaining land and funding for new parks.

Demographics and projected need for parks and open space in the Corridor

Population projections show that more than 12,000 new residents can be expected to be living in the Rockville Pike Plan area by 2040 (Attachment 1). Whether under existing mixed-use zoning or under a new code developed as an implementation tool of the Rockville Pike Plan, almost all new residential development within the planning area will be multifamily. New units will be predominantly in mid-rise condominium or rental buildings, with some potential for attached single-family housing (townhouses) as well. According to the Municipal Growth Element (MGE) of the Comprehensive Master Plan, adopted by the Mayor and Council in December 2010, “The most pressing need in the context of mixed-use redevelopment is expected to be ensuring the availability of open space within walking distance of multifamily homes.”¹

Residents create the greatest demand for parks and open space. The fact that about half of the City’s population growth is projected to occur in the Rockville Pike plan area over the next few decades indicates that there will be substantial demand for parks and open space in the corridor. This is especially true given the fact that there are no parks in the corridor now and very few nearby.

¹ Municipal Growth Element of the Comprehensive Master Plan, adopted December 13, 2010, p. 52.
<http://www.rockvillemd.gov/masterplan/elements/MunicipalGrowth121310.pdf>

New parks and open space also can be expected to draw from the wider City population and existing and future residents of the surrounding county. Some parks in the vicinity, such as Montrose Park just west of the southern end of the plan area, are already often utilized to capacity. At the same time, Rockville's park resources outside of the plan area and resources beyond the city limits can be expected to provide some of the amenities demanded by new residents.

Demographic characteristics and trends have the most impact on the kinds of park experiences that are demanded. While there is no single profile of multifamily households in urbanizing locations such as the Rockville Pike corridor, demographic groups who typically choose such this type of housing have tended to be smaller households, singles or couples with either no children or few very young children, empty nesters, and retirees.

Although fewer children are typically expected to be generated from multifamily housing as compared to single-family housing, this trend may change as the opportunities to build single-family detached houses decrease through the region. In addition, it is possible that more families with children may choose multifamily housing options in the future relative to the traditional choice of single-family homes, especially if single-family homes remain prohibitively expensive and/or distant from employment. An urbanizing shift within the Rockville Pike corridor may produce more children in multifamily homes than has been the case in recent history. This and other demographic trends will have an impact on the programming of parks, but will not change the amount of parkland that is needed.

According to the draft Rockville Pike Plan, the market is not expected to be as strong for office space as it is for residential over the next few decades, but approximately 5,000 additional jobs are projected to be located in the Plan area by 2040, mostly in the South Pike. Office employees create demand for park and open space before and after working hours and at lunch times.

Other likely users of parks and open space in the corridor are visitors and shoppers, given the continued retail focus of the Pike. Respite spots, benches and meeting places are also needed amenities in strategic locations.

Quantifying the need

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan

Rockville's Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROS Plan) is a policy document adopted by the Mayor and Council in March 2010 that is intended to be adopted into the Comprehensive Master Plan. It notes that the City has an overall goal of providing a ratio of 18 acres of parks and open space for every 1,000 City residents. As a comparison, Washington, DC has a ratio of 12.9 acres of park per 1,000 residents and has more green space per capita than any other U.S. city of its size.²

Rockville's goal has been achieved - even exceeded - in the past, in part, because it includes very large resources such as Redgate Golf Course, Glenview/Civic Center Park and parkland in the Rock Creek, Watts Branch and Cabin John Creek stream valleys. The PROS Plan acknowledges that this ratio will be difficult to maintain as portions of Rockville become increasingly urbanized and more densely developed, and land for parks becomes more scarce and costly to obtain. The PROS Plan states that maintaining this ratio would require an additional 142 acres of parkland Citywide through 2030.

The PROS Plan states that the greatest need for parks and open space is in the central and eastern portions of the City; the Rockville Pike Corridor is identified as a particular area of great need, given the projected population increase there and the current lack of parks. The PROS Plan recommends that 25 to 30 acres would be desirable in the Rockville Pike Plan area by 2030, but that some of this could "include the pedestrian/bicycle 'way' proposed in the [draft Rockville Pike] plan, and could, perhaps, include other types of space the City does not currently include in its inventory (such as quasi-public spaces)."³

² *Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space*, Draft Capital Space Plan, October 8, 2009.

³ Rockville Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan, p. 5-22. http://www.rockvillemd.gov/pros/PROS_3-15-10.pdf

Draft Rockville Pike Plan

The draft Rockville Pike Plan recommends turning the multi-way boulevard into the primary public open space in the plan area. “The greening of the Pike is a relatively inexpensive strategy with tremendous implications on the quality of life and the quality of the shopping experience along the Pike. Similarly, the proposed treatment of sidewalks along “A” and “B” streets will extend the type of urban open space envisioned for the Pike well into the study area.”⁴ Counting only the tree planting strips, sidewalks, and bike paths included in the two boulevard alternatives tentatively selected by the Planning Commission results in approximately 20 to 23 acres. However, these elements are often included as part of the City’s Complete Streets Policy anyway and it is debatable as to whether this acreage should be considered as contributing to public open space in the plan area even if it does improve the appearance and experience of being on the Pike. Although valuable, green areas, sidewalks and bike paths, as well as privately provided open spaces, do not serve the same function as dedicated parks.

The draft form code sets standards to create different types of urban open space within the corridor, including plazas, greens, parks, and squares. Five percent of the buildable area of each lot is required to be in contiguous open space, with another ten percent of the area dedicated to the City as fee-in-lieu to be used to acquire public open space within the corridor. These standards would provide some open space on every lot as well as some fee-in-lieu for every development. Staff believes that these standards may result in numerous minimally useable spaces and not be the most efficient way to generate the optimal number or sizes of parks that could most benefit the corridor.

Rockville’s Current Open Space/Public Use Space Requirements

The City’s existing requirements for public use and open space target 10-15% open space in the MXCD and MXTD zones, of which 5-10% must be accessible to and useable by the general public (public use). Green roofs are eligible as open space and storm water management areas and enhanced sidewalks may be eligible as public use space. Fee-in-lieu of providing space on site may be allowed under certain circumstances but the provision of open and public use space on site is generally preferred. This approach does not require any land to be dedicated to the City or designated as a Park Zone.

Goals for the Corridor

In determining what would be most valuable to the corridor, Recreation & Parks and Planning staff offer the following broad principles:

1. Dedicated parkland should be located within a ten-minute walk from any residence within the corridor. “Dedicated” parkland is land that is owned, controlled, and maintained by the City and is in the Park Zone. A ten-minute walk equates to roughly one-quarter to one-half mile distance, acknowledging that this varies for different individuals. Attachment 2 illustrates that parks are needed in each segment of the corridor (at least one on each side of the Pike in the South, at least one in the Middle, and at least one in the North) to meet this principle. The draft Rockville Pike Plan calls for open space within one-eighth of a mile from multifamily residential uses in the plan area, but some of this could be achieved by small publicly accessible open spaces that are not necessarily dedicated to the City which would augment the dedicated parkland.
2. A *minimum* of 10 acres of dedicated parkland is considered a reasonable goal for the entire corridor. The minimum acceptable size for a dedicated park is 3/10 acre, and some may be primarily hard-scape. Parks that serve active recreational functions need to be larger.
3. Other open spaces, such as tree lawns, landscaping and bicycle paths along the Pike, would provide the remaining resources identified as necessary in the PROS Plan.

⁴ Draft Rockville’s Pike: Envision a Great Place, p. 5.32

Ideally, the 10+ acres would be well-distributed throughout the corridor and would provide a wide range of functions, including recreational facilities (such as a skate park, playgrounds, and other facilities), neighborhood parks, a dog park, a community garden, and other open spaces that would serve a diverse community.⁵

South, Middle and North Pike

The corridor offers different challenges and opportunities within it.

The South Pike is the most urbanized portion of the plan area and will receive much of the City's population growth over the next few decades, as well as the bulk of the growth within the corridor. Much of the South Pike's growth is expected to be east of Rockville Pike. Several mixed-use projects are proposed on the east side under current regulatory requirements that require the provision of public use space as part of the open space requirement and/or a fee-in-lieu to help fund public use space in the area. There is currently no requirement that these spaces be dedicated to the City, only that they be accessible and available to the general public. There are, therefore, limited opportunities east of the Pike for dedicated park land. The City should consider acquiring land for a park east of the Pike. There may, however, be opportunities to acquire parks through dedication of land as larger sites west of the Pike redevelop.

The Middle Pike is most constrained geographically, particularly on the east side of the Pike, but it also offers the greatest opportunity for larger parks. One or two substantial (i.e., 3-5 or more acres) parks in the Middle Pike could also serve as resources for the North and South portions of the corridor. Parkland could be obtained if part or all of Woodmont Country Club were to redevelop. If the entire club were to redevelop, that land would be treated similarly to other substantial development projects, such as King Farm and Fallsgrove, in terms of obtaining substantial dedicated parkland for the City. Smaller spaces, such as pocket parks, on the east side of the Pike would also be desirable.

The North Pike is expected to receive the smallest amount of population growth and it has proximity to existing PROS resources such as Dawson Farm Park, Elwood Smith Park, and Veteran's Park, although there are some physical obstacles to pedestrian access from the Pike corridor. However, there are still opportunities for additional parkland and open space in the North Pike, especially if large parcels redevelop.

Options for obtaining land for parks

As noted in the PROS Plan, there are generally four ways to acquire parkland, each with its own challenges:

1. Create parks from land already publicly owned and controlled, such as rights-of-way, paper streets, street corners, etc.

Beyond "greening the Pike" and making it more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, there are limited opportunities to create parkland from publicly owned land in the corridor.

2. Donations or bequests.

Donations or bequests of land for parks are rare and difficult to predict unless the intention is indicated ahead of time.

3. Dedication of land to the City through the development process.

Redevelopment of parcels within the corridor offers another way to obtain acreage for parks and open space. The total developable acreage in the Pike Plan area is approximately 230 acres (after removing road and railroad rights-of-way and parts of the plan area that are outside of the City limits or within the Twinbrook Station project site.) Staff

⁵ The PROS Plan identifies specific facility needs on pp. 4-26-4.31.

estimates that roughly one-quarter of this area is likely to redevelop over the next 30 years, based on land to value ratios, the ages of existing buildings, and other data. The timing of redevelopment of individual properties is difficult to predict.

According to the MGE, “This approach is not always the most appropriate or strategic way to provide parks or open space. Not all sites can accommodate this set-aside. Assembling larger parcels can frequently provide a far better resource for the community than a series of small plots. As a result, in September 2010, Rockville adopted a system by which some developers may contribute a fee to the City, in lieu of providing the open space, to provide some funding for open space acquisition. It is not expected that this source will be sufficient to meet all of the needs.”

4. Fee simple acquisition, using fee-in-lieu and other sources.

The City can purchase property. Sources of funds could include General Funds, State or Federal funds, such as dedicated sources as fee-in-lieu, or a combination of these sources. Fees and other funds may go toward the acquisition of land as well as toward the build-out of parks. Fees-in-lieu are generally not sufficient for these purposes and must be augmented with other funding sources from the City, County or State.

Staff Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Rockville Pike Plan include the following guidance:

Parcels that are larger than 3 acres, when redeveloped, should be required to dedicate useable and accessible land that is no less than 3/10 acre in size to the City to be placed in the Park Zone. There are 19 parcels that are at least 3 acres in the plan area and they can be found in all segments of the plan area.

Parcels that are smaller than 3 acres should be required to meet public use space requirements entirely through fee-in-lieu. The funds would be used to acquire and build out parkland at strategic locations within the corridor. Small pocket parks and other open spaces, such as green roofs, would still be encouraged beyond this requirement. It is expected that most residential developments will provide amenities such as fitness rooms, community rooms, swimming pools, and playgrounds on site to meet some of the needs of their residents. In addition, forestry requirements and landscaping goals will help to “green” the corridor.

Though straw votes, the Planning Commission has provided two incentive stories to the maximum building height for the South Pike Urban Core frontage and one additional story as an incentive for all other frontages throughout the plan area. The requirements to earn these incentives have not yet been determined, although open space and other recreational facilities (such as a community center or senior center) has been discussed as one possibility (in addition to affordable housing and other options). Staff recommends that the Commission allow for an extra story or two (depending on frontage) if an applicant provides more land area or fee-in-lieu than otherwise required. The amount of money or land that would need to be provided to earn the bonus height would be determined by zoning.

South Pike

In the South Pike, the City should consider acquiring *at least* one contiguous half acre of land for an urban park between the Pike and the railroad tracks because that is anticipated to be the area of greatest density and population growth. At this time, there do not appear to be opportunities to obtain dedicated parkland through the development process in this area. Projects that are approved prior to adoption of a new Rockville Pike Plan would not be required to dedicate any land for parks because the existing (1989) Pike Plan and zoning regulations require no such dedication.

The City should plan to obtain at least one acre of parkland through dedication when parcels on the west side of the Pike redevelop.

Middle Pike

The City should plan to obtain the largest amount of parkland on the west side of the Middle Pike, should large properties in that area redevelop. A percentage of the land being redeveloped should be dedicated to the City to create one or more parks that could support athletic fields and facilities.

North Pike

There is potential for future redevelopment of large parcels in the North Pike, providing an opportunity to obtain land through dedication during the development process. A resource here would serve current residents south of Edmonston Drive as much as new residents. Small parks could also be created if the City chooses to acquire land.

As an implementation step, amendments to the zoning regulations would determine what the dedication and fee-in-lieu standards should be to achieve these goals. Programming of dedicated parks would occur upon acquisition of the land based on needs at the time.

Next Steps

Remaining topics include:

Sidewalks (Tentative date: April 11, 2012)

Outstanding transportation issues (Fleet Street extension, bicycle accommodations for Jefferson Street extension, congestion management, Montgomery County Transit Task Force Report on BRT) (Tentative date: April 25, 2012)

Plan implementation (Tentative date: May 9, 2012)

Attachments

1. Rockville Pike Study Area, Current and Projected Population by Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ)
2. Rockville Pike Plan – Open Space Needs Assessment Map

cc: Susan Swift
Andrew Gunning
Mayra Bayonet
Clark Larson
Deane Mellander
Burt Hall
Steve Mader
Chris Henry
Betsy Thompson
Craig Simoneau
Emad Elshafei
Peter Campanides